DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 147 215 SO 010 428

AUTHOR Scarlett, Jack
TITLE Back to Basics: Is Social Studies Included? Monograph No. 2.
INSTITUTION Wollengong Inst. of Education, New South Wales (Australia).
PUB DATE [76]
NOTE 12p.; Not available in hard copy from EDRS due to small type size of original document

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 Plus Postage. HC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS Analytical Criticism; *Comparative Education; Definitions; *Educational Trends; Elementary Education; Elementary School Curriculum; Progressive Education; *Social Studies
IDENTIFIERS *Australia; *Back to Basics; Canada; Great Britain; New Social Studies

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the implication of the back to basics movement in elementary school social studies. The paper is divided into three sections, each of which considers a different aspect of the issue. Part one briefly discusses the nature and extent of the back to basics movement in the United States. The various interpretations of the term basics are examined. The author believes that the movement is at least partly responsible for a decline in the quality of social studies teaching in the United States. Also examined in part one are reactions to the movement in Great Britain, developments in Canada, and back to basics in Australia. The second part of the paper deals with the declining standards of education in Australia. Two research studies, on which the case of the decline theory rests, are examined. The role that some magazines and newspapers have played in contributing to the climate of dissatisfaction is also discussed. The third and final section of the paper treats the implications of the back to basics movement for the teaching of social studies in Australian primary schools. Criticisms of the new social studies are discussed. (Author/RM)

****
* Documents acquired by ERIC include many informal unpublished *
* materials not available from other sources. ERIC makes every effort *
* to obtain the best copy available. Nevertheless, items of marginal *
* reproducibility are often encountered and this affects the quality *
* of the microfiche and hardcopy reproductions ERIC makes available *
* via the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). EDRS is not *
* responsible for the quality of the original document. Reproductions *
* supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original. *
****

ED147215

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
J. Scarlett
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

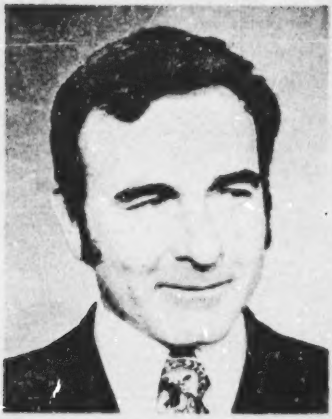
BACK TO BASICS

Is Social Studies Included?

SP 010 428

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

by Jack Scarlett



JACK SCARLETT
LECTURER IN SOCIAL SCIENCE

Monograph No. 2.

WOLLONGONG INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION, P.O. BOX 1496, WOLLONGONG. 2500.

In Monograph No. 2 Wollongong Institute of Education presents a major current educational challenge in the subject field of social studies, one different from that appearing in Monograph No. 1.

While our purposes in printing and distributing this monograph are the same as for the first one, we would this time request your responses to the intrinsic material. Of course we received many letters of thanks for the first paper, much to our encouragement : but this time the emphasis is not only on what Jack Scarlett has to say on the great debate and on social studies but on what all of us in the enterprise of education must decide to do - or not to do.

MAURICE E. HALE,
DIRECTOR, W.I.E.

Monograph 3 will be a typescript of the inaugural Institute Lecture by Professor Manning Clark on the "Future of Australia".

CORRIGENDA

It is regretted that some printing errors were not corrected. Attention is drawn to the following:

Page 2
Under heading, "Reactions in Britain"
line 11 "basis" should read "basis"
line 12 "leads of" should read "leads to"
line 17 "philisophy" should read "philosophy"

Page 3
line 1 "is" should read "in"
line 2 omit comma after "articles"
line 4 "The Australian" should read "the Australian"
line 12 Footnote 15 belongs after "scandal"
line 14 "voqueish" should read "vogueish"
line 15 "approached" should read "approach"
line 30 there should be single quotation marks before "let's", not double

Page 4
line 9 "criticims" should read "criticisms"
line 36 "tests" should read "texts"

Page 5
line 19 "criticims" should read "criticisms"
line 20 "english" should read "English"
line 47 "are" should read "is"

Page 6
In Heading: "criticims" should read "criticisms"
line 20 omit comma after "teachers"
Footnote 32: "Cirriculum" should read "Curriculum"

Page 7
line 15 "qualitive" should read "qualitative"
line 51 "concern to" should read "concern of"

Page 8
line 15 "the" should read "then"
line 25 "appllied" should read "applied"

Bibliography
"An introduction New York" should read "An Introduction, New York"

Toward the end of 1976, I was granted study leave from Wollongong Institute of Education to investigate the teaching of social studies in elementary schools in the United States of America. The timing of the leave was such that I was able to attend the 56th Annual Conference of the National Council for the Social Studies in Washington, D.C. My paper will discuss the "Back to Basics" movement which commands considerable support throughout America. I believe that this movement is at least partly responsible for a decline in the quality of social studies teaching in that country,[1] and also seems to have important implications for the teaching of social studies in N.S.W. primary schools. The paper is divided into three sections, each of which considers a different aspect of the issue.

- The nature and extent of the "Back to Basics" movement.
- The "Decline" Theory.
- The implications of the "Back to Basics" issue for social studies teaching in N.S.W. primary schools.

A. THE NATURE AND EXTENT OF THE "BACK TO BASICS" MOVEMENT

A belief that there has been a decline in the quality of teaching and the achievements of children, particularly in written and spoken English and also mathematics, has given rise to a demand by some educators and parents that schools concentrate on the basic subjects such as mathematics and English, and approach them by more traditional methods.[2] This would mean that schools would not concern themselves to the same extent with "less important" subjects.

But the term "basics" can be interpreted in a number of ways.[3] One meaning which may be assigned is that there is some minimum body of knowledge that children should acquire. Thus, in mathematics, emphasis is placed on learnings such as multiplication tables, in social studies attention is concentrated on names, dates, places, discoveries, wars, etc., and English is concerned with spelling and sentence structure. Among the teaching strategies used, drill and testing occupy positions of importance.

Teaching "basics" can also be associated with a return to stricter standards of behaviour. This interpretation implies a classroom with a more formal environment including fixed seating and submissive students.

Another version defines "basics" as skills, and is concerned with children's mastery of major skills in numeracy, reading, writing and thinking.

THE "BACK TO BASICS" MOVEMENT IN THE U.S.A.

The session which attracted the largest audience at the Washington conference was one entitled "Back to Basics : Is Social Studies Included ?" The participants were George Weber, from the Council for Basic Education, and Larry Cuban, from Arlington Public Schools, who represented a more liberal viewpoint.

Weber claimed that teachers and parents across the nation were concerned about the decline in educational standards at all levels, and that this concern was being manifested in a variety of ways namely;

- more emphasis in elementary schools on the "three R's"
- greater interest in pupil achievement now that more sophisticated measures are available
- close scrutiny being given to innovations in schools, especially the new mathematics in elementary schools
- the closing down of open-plan classrooms across the country
- demands for evidence of academic proficiency with moves being made to adopt minimum standards for promotion and the award of diplomas
- tightening up on discipline, both physical and academic. In some cases this means reverting to corporal punishment. Teachers are claiming that worthwhile learning can't always be entertaining. In colleges, lecturers are reasserting that they know more about what should be in the curriculum than eighteen year-olds do.

[1] This impression was gained from contact with social studies educators in the U.S.A. It is also the substance of a paper by Professor R.E. Gross, "The Social Studies in their Golden Years : An Inhouse Medical Assay", *Social Studies Supervisors Association Newsletter*, V, No. 3 (Winter 1976), 1-2.

[2] This was the main argument of an address given by George Weber, from the Council for Basic Education, at the 56th Annual Meeting of the National Council for the Social Studies, Washington, D.C., November, 1976.

[3] B.K. Beyer, "Teaching Basics in the Social Studies", *Social Education*, XL, No. 2 (February, 1977), 98-104.

There is other evidence to suggest that many favoured the return to a more traditional style of education.
e.g.,

(a) In the publication, *English Journal*, an advertisement which exhorts teachers to buy certain resource materials, reads in part, "What the others are coming back to, we never left : traditional English".[4]

(b) A recent edition of the journal *Social Education* contains four articles concerned with teaching basics in social studies.[5]

(c) The ubiquitous phrase "Back to Basics" was continually introduced in interviews I had with educators from San Francisco east to Boston.

(d) There have been a number of American contributions to the Black Papers on Education (7, 8 and 9).

REACTIONS IN BRITAIN

Some ten years ago, a British governmental body called the Central Advisory Council on Education published a report, *Children and Their Primary Schools*. This is usually referred to as the Plowden Report, after the chairperson of the body producing it, Lady Plowden.

The Plowden Report, taking account of the gradual changes that had occurred in British primary schools over the preceding forty years, described a new concept of what good primary schools should be. Consideration of the teacher's role, classroom environment, and details of curricula to be followed were included. Classrooms which approximated this concept were marked by informality, active participation by children with a variety of materials, and flexibility of curricula.[6]

A vigorous reaction to the progressive schools was not long in coming. A series of Black Papers,[7] denouncing the use of free play methods in primary schools, comprehensive schemes in secondary schools, and the expansion of higher education, was published between 1968 and 1975. The basic of most of the arguments in them seems to be a rejection of egalitarianism, which, it is claimed, leads of a decline in the quality of education, as standards of all institutions are "levelled down to a uniform mediocrity".[8] This, the argument continues, leads to educational permissiveness, a decline in standards, and a lack of structure in progressive education, which is damaging to some children.

Although most of the attacks were directed against the idea of comprehensive schools, several of the articles were specifically critical of the philisophy which is fundamental to the progressive schools, and argues for a return to a curriculum which places greater emphasis on "knowledge to be acquired and facts to be stored".[9]

DEVELOPMENTS IN CANADA

In Canada, some educationists are disenchanted with the country's adoption of certain aspects of progressive education. Michael Benyon, in an article which deals with Canada's attempts to eliminate the concept of failure from its schools, describes the program as "intellectual havoc".[10]

The Failsafe Program, introduced in 1968, was an attempt to move away from the practice of selecting by competitive examination those pupils suited for higher education. The article cites comments by Professor J.A. Lee, which deplore what he saw to be the resultant decline in standards of students at tertiary institutions.

"BACK TO BASICS" IN AUSTRALIA

In this country there is considerable evidence of a general feeling of concern about educational standards. Groups and individuals have expressed this anxiety in various ways.

- Sandra Jobson, in a series of articles,[11] painted a gloomy picture of standards in Australian schools and tertiary institutions.

[4] National Council of Teachers of English, *English Journal*, LXVI, No. 1 (January 1977), p. 59.

[5] National Council for the Social Studies, *Social Education* XLI, No. 2 (February 1977).

[6] These criteria are described in detail in J. Featherstone, *An Introduction*, New York : Citation Press, 1971.

[7] For example, C.B. Cox, and R. Boyson (eds.), *The Fight for Education : Black Paper 1975*, London : J.M. Rent & Sons, 1975.

[8] A.Maude, "The Egalitarian Threat", *The Fight for Education* : eds. C.B. Cox and R. Boyson, London : J.M. Rent & Sons, 1968, 7-8.

[9] G.H. Bartock, "Progressivism and the Content of Education", *Black Paper*, 1975, 14-20.

[10] The Times Educational Supplement (London), October 1, 1976.

[11] *The Australian*, November, 1976.

- Concern of a different kind was revealed by Dr. John Vaughan, who is replying to these articles, deplored the polarisation of the analysis of issues which occurs when people and ideas are labelled as "traditional" or "progressive".[12]
- In an editorial headed, "The Battle in the Schools", The Australian discussed the arguments between "progressives" and "traditionalists".[13]

"Progressives" are described as tending to give children more freedom of choice in what they learn, opening up classrooms, and generally being concerned more with social rather than vocational education. This division is described as "possibly one of the most important issues facing the nation to-day".

Following the publication of the results of the study, *Literacy and Numeracy in Australian Schools* conducted by the Australian Council for Educational Research,[14] *The Bulletin* carried an article entitled, "Australia's Education Scandal". It proclaimed that there has been a massive failure of education in[15] both the primary and secondary schools. Denouncing the progressive trends in Australian Education, it claimed that "Education is obsessively experimentalist, rushing to embrace new voqueish ideas as panaceas to problems. Open schools, the discovery approached to teaching, the play-way to learning, these ideas are adopted wholesale by educationists moving with all the intelligent forethought and analysis of a flock of sheep". A follow-up article inviting reader reaction appeared soon after.[16]

- Thea Astley, author and university lecturer, in an article entitled, "The Higher Illiteracy", deplores the declining standard of written language skills of students, which she claims highlights the need for the remedial classes in written expression conducted at Macquarie University.[17]
- A general note which the English Syllabus Committee has added to the revised English syllabus for Year 11 and Year 12 students in N.S.W. schools, points out that although a formal study of English grammar is not required, students are expected to be able to identify parts of speech, recognise grammatical classifications, and have other specific knowledge about the structure of language.
- Dr. K.R. McKinnon, Chairman of the Australian Schools Commission, has pointed to the emergence of support for a traditional approach to education. "Opposition to innovation and change in Australian education, which was submerged for a period, has become more confident, more obvious. The forces of reaction, the "let's keep it cosy, don't rock the boat, boys' are back on deck".[18]
- In September, 1976 the Prime Minister announced that there would be a Committee of Inquiry into Education and Training.
- A conference to be held at Darling Downs Institute of Education in May, 1977 is using as its theme, "Excellence or Equality : A dilemma for Higher Education ?"

The reactions of the individuals and groups described above are indicative of a prevailing climate of dissatisfaction with certain developments generally labelled "progressive" that have occurred in Australian schools, colleges and universities.

B. THE DECLINE THEORY[19]

Several questions should now be raised :

1. Have standards of teaching and achievement in Australian education institutions declined ?
2. If such a decline has occurred, to what extent is this due to the use of "Progressive" methods ?

The case for the declining standards theory rests largely on the results of two studies :

(a) The study of Dr. Neville Bennett, "Teaching Styles and Pupil Progress,"[20] which was concerned with the questions do differences in teaching styles differentially affect the cognitive

[12] *The Australian*, November, 1976.

[13] *The Australian*, November 6, 1976.

[14] Australian Council for Educational Research, *Literacy and Numeracy in Australian Schools*, March, 1976.

[15] *The Bulletin*, May 15, 1976.

[16] *The Bulletin*, June 26, 1976.

[17] T. Astley, "The Higher Illiteracy", *National Times*, 1976.

[18] K.R. McKinnon, "Educational Reform and Student Literacy", *Teacher Feedback*, V, No. 1 (March 1977), 5-7.

[19] This phrase was used by Graham Little in "The Phony Crisis", *The National Times*, July 26-31, 1976.

[20] *The Times Educational Supplement* (London), April 30.

and emotional development of pupils ? and do different types of pupils perform better under certain teaching styles ? Traditionalists have argued that Bennett's findings lend support to their claims that formal teaching methods produce better results in reading and mathematics than do progressive methods.

(b) The Australian Council for Education Research (A.C.E.R.) study *Literacy and Numeracy in Australian Schools* (March, 1976), which revealed surprisingly low standards of achievement by many children in the sample tested.

The results of Bennett's work are far from conclusive, for doubt has been raised about several aspects of the study. Rogers and Barron offer a number of criticims :[21]

- The formal teachers used in the study were generally older. Bennett may therefore have been testing the effectiveness of teaching experience rather than teaching styles.
- The nature of the sample of children used was questioned. It was felt that insufficient information was given.
- Concern was expressed about the statistics used.

Again, Gray and Satterly conclude that "no valid conclusion can be reached on the basis of the published evidence".[22] They question the presentation and interpretation of results and their educational significance, the manner in which the classification of teaching styles was originally established, the statistical procedures used, and most importantly, the adequacy of the external controls.

In view of criticisms such as these, great care must be exercised in interpreting the results obtained. Indeed, Dr. Bennett is reported to have cautioned against the use of his findings to support one side or the other in the controversy over methods.[23]

With regard to the A.C.E.R. study, the results cannot be used as evidence for a decline in standards of literacy and numeracy, since comparable figures giving details of ealier levels are not available.[24]

Although the issue is far from resolved, some magazines and newspapers have contributed to the climate of dissatisfaction which seems to exist. *The Enquiry into Literacy and Numeracy* states that "Illiteracy has been promoted as a 'social problem' of considerable magnitude by the media in Australia in the last two years".[25] But at times, the logic inherent in some of the claims made by the media is dubious.
e.g.,

(a) When the late Dr. W.C. Radford of the A.C.E.R., in replying to a magazine article, pointed out that the "abysmal standards revealed by the Literacy and Numeracy Report" did not prove that there had been any decline in standards, the journalist concerned concluded :[26]
"At the same time, the lack of statistical proof of a deterioration in education does not mean there has not been such a deterioration". No comment is necessary.

(b) In the same article, the journalist looked at Dr. Vaughan's statement that "the A.C.E.R. study indicates that many students are unable to read school texts and reference books with understanding. This is as much a commentary on the tests and the books as on students". He interpreted it as meaning, "texts and reference books should be rewritten to correspond with today's lower standards of comprehension".

(c) A book review was prefaced by "any parent who is alarmed by the drastic decline in modern standards of education can take heart from a marvellously entertaining new book".[27]

It will be noticed that in each of the examples above, it is explicitly stated that an educational decline has occurred, yet no convincing supporting evidence has been advanced. But in fact, a study by Judith Goyen suggests that quite the opposite has occurred.[28] She concluded that people educated in traditional schools before the Depression are twelve times more likely to be illiterate as current fourteen-year-olds, including migrants. Obviously, these findings must also be viewed with considerable reserve, since the scores obtained by the older subjects would be affected by the time which has elapsed since they left school.

[21] V.R. Rogers and J. Barron "Questioning the Evidence", *The Times Educational Supplement* (London), April 30, 1976.

[22] J. Gray and D. Satterly "A Chapter of Errors : Teaching Styles and Pupil Progress in Retrospect", *Educational Research*, XIX, No. 1, 45-56.

[23] Lady Plowden "A Decade of Plowden", *The Times Educational Supplement* (London), January 14, 1977.

[24] Rev. Dr. J.K. Williams, "Imparting Basic Skills", *ACES Review*, IV, No. 1 (Feb. - March, 1977), 8-10.

[25] N.S.W. Department of Education, *Enquiry into Literacy and Numeracy*, Sydney : November, 1976, p. 1.

[26] *The Bulletin*, June 26, 1976.

[27] *The Sun Herald*, April 3, 1977.

[28] J. Goyen, *Functional Literacy Survey*, Unpublished documents, Macquarie University.

We seem to be faced again with the phenomenon that if enough people claim something to be true, a general acceptance of it builds up in the community without any hard evidence to back it up being necessary. It is possible that Graham Little is right in claiming that we have a phony crisis in education. For as the *Enquiry into Literacy and Numeracy* points out,[29] "the assessment of rise or decline in standards of competence over time is inherently problematic," and "the claim that standards of competence are declining gains more attention than other views, yet it is based more on assumption than factual evidence. There has never been a 'golden age of literacy'."

People such as Thea Astley, whose intuition leads them to believe that a decline in standards has occurred, may not in fact be taking account of differences in sample composition. Many students nowadays going on to university and colleges would have been excluded on ability grounds in previous years. therefore the sample is weighted at the lower end of the ability scale. What she might be seeing is not a decline in standards so much as a different sample of the population.

The point I am making is this. Educationists should suspend judgement until further evidence is brought to light, and not be panicked into accepting the necessity for a return of more traditional methods of education because of a decline that might not have occurred. For although mistakes have undoubtedly been made, I believe that some very real progress has been made in recent years, perhaps more so in social studies than in any other area.

C. IMPLICATIONS FOR THE TEACHING OF SOCIAL STUDIES IN N.S.W. PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Although the main thrust of the criticims of progressive methods is directed against the teaching of english and mathematics, the logical extension of this argument is that there should be a return to traditional methods of teaching social studies. This is particularly so because in few other areas have such major changes occurred. The social studies guidelines introduced in the early 1970's represented a major departure from traditional social studies.[30]

The committee which drew up the guidelines called upon the expertise of leading Australian and American social studies educators. Major changes from the previous syllabus include :

- an emphasis on the processes of acquiring, transforming and interpreting information. This central emphasis on social studies skills is perhaps the greatest change, since in the past the focus has been almost entirely on content.
- the adoption of the unit as the organisational device for teaching social studies. The unit's flexible structure allows for the provision of a variety of learning activities to cater for individual differences among learners with respect to ability and interests, and the preferred mode of learning.
- the absence of any prescribed subject matter to be taught. Units are built around focus questions, and teachers are asked to use their professional judgement in selecting subject matter to illustrate the focus questions. Selection of content should take account of children's interests and abilities, their past experiences, and the availability of resource materials. The previous syllabus was largely prescriptive, with a substantial body of factual information to be presented in each grade.
- more attention to the structure of knowledge. Since factual information often becomes dated in a short time, more enduring forms of knowledge are introduced to children. Concept formation and the development of warranted generalisations are emphasised.
- a sharper focus on "people" as the proper subject matter of social studies. The use of content from social science disciplines such as economics, social psychology, etc., corrects what has probably been an over-dependence upon history and geography in past syllabuses.
- an emphasis on pupil involvement. The breadth of subject matter prescribed in the previous syllabus caused many teachers to rely almost entirely on telling procedures to present information. A variety of kinds of learning activities are recommended in the "new" social studies,[31] namely,

(a) Intake activities, which are used to enable children to acquire information, e.g., viewing a film, reading books, going on an excursion, etc.

[29] Op. Cit. p. 6.

[30] Department of Education of N.S.W. *1975 Curriculum for Primary Schools Social Studies Guidelines* Sydney, 1975.

[31] As outlined in J. Fraenkel, *Teaching Students How to Think and Value : Strategies for Teaching Social Studies*. New Jersey : Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1973. Chapter IV.

(b) Organizational activities, which are used to make sense out of raw data so that interpretation is simplified, e.g., drawing graphs, making an environment board, etc.

(c) Demonstrative activities which allow children to demonstrate what they have learned, e.g., role play, discussions, etc.

(d) Creative activities which allow children to express what they have learned by creating a new product, e.g., building models, painting, writing a poem.

Teachers are also encouraged to take their social studies lessons out of the classrooms, when appropriate, so that children can deal with real problems and obtain practice in using primary sources of data. When this is not possible, concrete models or visual images of reality can be used.

- the use of a few in-depth case studies rather than an attempt at "ground covering".
- the elevation of social studies to a position of central importance in the overall school curriculum, since it is possible to organise so many activities within a social studies unit.

I believe the changes described above to be desirable ones. They are changes which take account of changes in society, in knowledge about society, in children, in teachers and administrators, in techniques in learning and teaching, and in plans and priorities.[32]

CRITICIMS OF PROGRESSIVE METHODS IN SOCIAL STUDIES

As part of the reaction against the use of progressive methods in schools, specific criticisms of the "new" social studies have been made. A sample of these is listed below :

- An article by Emily E. Ravell argued that history and geography are seriously neglected in the primary school. She is in favour of teachers, "reverting once more to the high standards required in the old curriculum".[33]
- A concerned parent complained that she had to struggle to teach the children the basics of reading and arithmetic at home, while her children did subjects like MACOS (Man : A Course of Study) at school and visited the local beach to study the herring-gull in its environment.[34]
- The Rev. Dr. J.K. Williams seems to have had social studies in mind when he criticised "such contemporary innovations as 'discovery' methods of learning, 'open planning' and 'free schools'".[35]
- The late Professor James McAuley, deploring what he saw in the non-scholastic purposes of modern schools, criticised the emphasis on values education and "Unstructured social studies".[36]

Numerous other specific criticisms could be instanced, and criticisms such as these have caused Norman Baker, who played a major role in introducing the "new" social studies into N.S.W. schools, to warn teachers to resist the arguments of those who favour a "Back to Basics" movement. He fears that this could lead to a reduction in the time spent on social studies.[37]

But it seems to me that there are five kinds of criticisms made of the "new" social studies. These are :

(a) Some see social studies as something other than a "basic" subject, and demand more reading, writing, arithmetic and spelling for the primary child. Presumably this will be at the expense of subjects such as social studies, music, art and physical education.
I believe that this has happended in some parts of the U.S.A. I was told by Mr. Phil Synott, elementary school supervisor of graduate students at the University of California,[38] that social studies teaching is currently at a low ebb in California. The State of California requires that standardised tests in reading and mathematics be administered to elementary school classes, and this puts immense pressure on teachers. Consequently social studies is largely neglected in [illegible] This impression was strengthened during contact with other social studies educators.

[32] D. Dufty, "Changing the Social Studies Cirriculum", *The Education Gazette*, LXV, No. 5 (June 1970), 213-221.

[33] Emily E. Revell, "Some Reflections on Teaching", *ACES Review*, IV, No. 1 (February, March 1977), 7-8.

[34] *The Bulletin*, June 26, 1976.

[35] Rev. Dr. J.K. Williams, "Imparting Basic Skills", *ACES Review*, IV (February, March 1977), 8-10.

[36] Prof. J. McAuley "Education in Decline : Towards a New Barbarism", *Sydney Morning Herald*, August 18, 1975.

[37] *St. George Council for Social Education in Schools*, No. 1, March 1977.

[38] Interview at Berkeley Campus, October 18, 1976.

But my argument is that if "basics" are defined as "skills", then surely most would agree that the skills of thinking taught in the "new" social studies are an integral part of literacy and numeracy. Effective learning in the social studies requires the use of skills to uncover process and interpret data related to problems of significance. Teachers should resist any attempt to put more emphasis on reading, writing, spelling and mathematics, if this change is to be at the expense of social studies.

(b) A second argument advocates a return to a content-oriented syllabus, such as was used until the early 1970's. In the past, content has been the prime focus of social studies, but it has become increasingly obvious that content cannot be taught as an end in itself.
The assertion that social studies is most effective when children store up facts, beliefs, principles, etc., presumably for use at a later date, is difficult to sustain in a world of increasingly rapid change. The accumulation of knowledge in the social sciences has been so vast in recent years that it renders much of what we teach obsolete in a short time. I realise that this is an old argument but, as Postman and Weingartner point out, the degree of change has been so great in recent times that there has developed a qualitive difference in the character of change. Change has changed [39]
Under such circumstances, teaching children how to learn is the safest way to educate them for an unknown future.

(c) A third argument regrets the omission of certain content deemed to be part of Australian children's cultural heritage. Most would agree that an educated person should possess certain knowledge about his/her society, and therefore would consider it important that subject matter concerned with the founding of our nation, the growth of the early settlement, exploration and and expansion of the colony, etc., should be included somewhere in the school programme.
Unfortunately this subject matter is often neglected by teachers. There is a reason for this that I will discuss later in this paper, but I will restrict myself at present to the observation that the guidelines make ample provision for such content. Units built around questions such as How does a city grow? (with early Sydney as an example) and Why do men explore? (taking account of the voyages of Cook, the inland explorers and even the moon landings) can be posed so that the content in question can be explored.

(d) A fourth criticism expresses concern about the "Americanisation" of our social studies, following the introduction of several major North American programmes such as Man : A Course of Study (M.A.C.O.S.).
Indeed, M.A.C.O.S. has been under heavy attack in the U.S.A. for a variety of reasons, particularly in some of the more conservative states such as Arizona.[40] But it should be realised that in Australia an attempt has been made to develop a broader interpretation of M.A.C.O.S., with teachers bringing to bear their own expertise and initiative and their knowledge of local material to enrich the programme. A viewing of the film *The Last to Discover Water* should convince most that Australian teachers have attempted to compensate for some of the American emphasis in M.A.C.O.S.[41]
It is worth noting that several uniquely Australian units such as "The Aborigines of the Western Desert" were developed directly as a result of Australian teachers contact with M.A.C.O.S. I think the overall impact of the programmes has been beneficial, in that they have opened up new avenues of thought for teachers and teacher educators.

(e) The final argument is centred on a supposed lack of structure, organization and teacher direction in the new social studies. I refer again to specific criticisms made by Professor McAuley and Rev. Dr. J.K. Williams.[42]
Dr. Williams states that, "the child who is 'freed' from an informed adult will, does not magically become self-directing; he is merely delivered into the hands of an uninformed peer-group. Abdication of responsibility by the teacher means domination by the gang, the mob — hence the rule of the average and the depression of excellence".

In some classrooms, concern to this kind may be justified. But this is not the fault of "progressive" social studies, but what I see to be the misinterpretation of the social studies guidelines by some teachers. I am not blaming teachers for this situation. The reasons are tied up with the difficulties of releasing teachers from the demands of full-time teaching, so

[39] N. Postman & C. Weingartner, *Teaching As a Subversive Activity*, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1969, p. 23
[40] See "The M.A.C.O.S. Controversy : Pro/Con Forum" *Social Education*, October, 1975, 388-396
[41] N.S.W. Department of Education, *The Last to Discover Water*.
[42] Op. Cit. p.9

that they can become familiar with a syllabus requiring different emphases and new teaching strategies. Teachers of some years standing are especially disadvantaged, since they have had little or no instruction and practice in curriculum development. But this I consider to be a short-term problem.

Used effectively, the inquiry approach suggested by the social studies guidelines involves engaging students in activities that are carefully planned, sequenced and structured. The teacher's guidance is of paramount importance, and the result is far from what is envisaged by Dr. Williams.

CONCLUSION

In this paper I have examined the implications for primary school social studies of the "Back to Basics" movement. The possibility has been raised that the "crisis" in education has arisen because enough people have claimed that it exists. More convincing evidence needs to be produced before it can be conclusively established that a decline in educational standards of teaching and pupil achievement has occurred.

If it were to be generally accepted that a return to more traditional methods of instruction is desirable, the social studies could be affected in three ways :

(a) the time devoted to the teaching of social studies might be reduced,

(b) a syllabus emphasising traditional content could be reintroduced,

(c) social studies could lose its present position of central importance in the overall school curriculum.

But this will only happen if educators do not see social studies for what it is : a basic subject which is concerned with basic skills. As Gross and Chapin put it, "students must acquire minimum basic skills and thinking competencies fundamental to survival in an industrialised urban culture. A competency or skill centred program can enable students to live responsibly in a changing world".[43]

Social studies must be regarded not as a body of knowledge, but as a set of related skills which be appllied to subject matter of significance. As Shirley Engle, past president of the National Council for the Social Studies, recently put it :—

"Will the real social studies please stand up ?"[44]

[43] J.R. Chapin and R.E. Gross, *Teaching Social Studies Skills*, Boston : Cuttle Brown & Co., 1973, p. 1.

[44] S.H. Engle, "Will the Real Social Studies Please Stand Up ?" paper presented at the 56th Annual Meeting of the National Council for the Social Studies, November 4, 1976.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BENNETT, N. — "Teaching Styles and Pupil Progress", *The Times Educational Supplement*, April 30, 1975.

BEYER, B.K. — "Teaching Basics in the Social Studies", *Social Education, XL, No. 2* (February 1977), 96-104.

CHAPIN, J. R. and GROSS, R. E. — *Teaching Social Studies Skills*, Boston : Cuttle Brown & Co. 1973.

COX, C.B. and BOYSON, R. (eds.) — *The Fight for Education* : Black Paper 1975. London : J.M. Dent & Sons 1975.

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION N.S.W. — *Enquiry into Literacy and Numeracy*, November 1976. *1975 Curriculum for Primary School : Social Studies Guidelines*. Sydney 1975.

DUFTY, D. — *"Changing the Social Studies Curriculum"*, The Education Gazette LXV, No. 5 (June 1970), 213-221.

FEATHERSTONE, J. — *An introduction* New York : Citation Press, 1971.

FRAENKEL, J. — *Teaching Students How to Think and Value : Strategies for Teaching Social Studies*. New Jersey : Prentice-Hall Inc. 1973.

GRAY, J. and SATTERLY, D. — "A Chapter of Errors : Teaching Styles and Pupil Progress in Retrospect", *Educational Research*, XIX, No. 1, 45-56.

GROSS, R.E. — "The Social Studies — their Golden Years : An Inhouse Medical Assay", *Social Studies Supervisor Association Newsletter*, V, No. 3 (Winter 1976), 1-2.

POSTMAN, N. and WEINGARTNER, C. — *Teaching As a Subversive Activity*. Hammondsworth : Penguin Books 1969.

ROGERS, V.R. and BARRON, J. — "Questioning the Evidence", *The Times Educational Supplement*, April 30, 1976.